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ABSTRACT

A psychological/ritual model of criticism is used to examine the movie "The Deer Hunter" as a rhetorical event in which males undergo psychological change through their war and postwar experiences. The critical model depends on understanding a Jungian interpretation of the human psyche, the form and function of initiation rituals, and the psychological changes that are linked to specific attitudes toward rituals. Using this model, the three main male characters in "The Deer Hunter" are observed as they cope with the initiation rituals of marriage, the deer hunt, the war, and the Russian roulette played within the war. The three psychological patterns that occur in the movie's characters are the regressive restoration of Steven's persona, Nick's identification with his unconscious/shadow self, and Michael's individuation ("coming to selfhood"). Although understanding "The Deer Hunter" seems to demand viewing war aesthetically, this viewpoint raises several serious problems, such as the legitimization of war and the warrior-type persona. It is not clear whether the film is rabidly antiwar, whether it merely portrays what war does to people under both sacred and profane experiences, or whether it implicitly advocates personal and societal transcendence through killing. On whatever level one chooses to interpret the film, however, viewing war aesthetically as a universal ritual remains bothersome. Ironically, by bypassing the politics of Vietnam, the film may have unwittingly allied itself with a heinous political ideology--fascism. (RL)

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"The Deer Hunter": Rhetoric of the Warrior

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"The Deer Hunter," winner of five Academy Awards, was one of the most controversial films of 1978. The film was celebrated for its "power,"[1] its "range and...breadth of experience," its "authenticity,"[2] and its "fiercely loving embrace of life in a death-ridden time."[3] Representing this laudatory perspective is the statement of Jack Kroll: "'The Deer Hunter' dares to say that things have come down to life vs. death, and it's time that someone said this big and strong and without fear."[4] But "The Deer Hunter" was also deprecated because of its limited view of the Vietnam War,[5] its "romantic adolescent boy's view of friendship,"[6] and its reflection of the director's ignorance and perversity "to the point of being megalomanical."[7] Epitomizing this stance is the reaction of Studs Terkel: "Not since 'The Birth of a Nation' has a non-Caucasian people been portrayed in so barbaric a fashion....The difference between 'The Birth of a Nation' and 'The Deer Hunter' is the difference between D. W. Griffith and Michael Cimino. One was a genius who happened to be a racist. The other is simply a cheap-shot artist."[8]

What interests us in these criticisms is a particular pattern in the way these critics interpreted the film. Those who praised it saw it as an artistic event and its message as a metaphor transcending the immediate subject matter. Those who condemned it viewed it as a social-political statement, a literal representation of the true meaning of the Vietnam War and America's participation in it. Our position is that "The Deer Hunter" is an important aesthetic-rhetorical artifact. Its message concerns the psychological pattern of change that men experience in war and how this change affects their future societal growth. This change is determined by the attitudes toward and participation in culturally

sanctified rituals. The theme that unifies the film's message is universal and the persuasive power of its expression in "The Deer Hunter" justifies our claim of the film's high artistic achievement. In support of these claims, we propose a "Psychological/Ritual Model," which we use to analyze the film. From that analysis, we suggest implications of both the model and the film for future studies in rhetorical criticism.

Before presenting the theoretical framework we need to clarify our notion of "model criticism," because it differs from some other typical conceptions and usages of the method. Our use of the model method of criticism is most in line with what Brockriede terms "explanation," an attempt to account for how an aspect of a rhetorical experience works by relating it to a theoretical system more general than itself. Motivated to solve some problem or problems in a rhetorical event that cannot be explained by referring to internal relations within the work itself, the critic proceeds inductively rather than deductively, selecting appropriate concepts and categories while in the process of studying the event.[9] These concepts may occur to the critic only as he or she approaches the particular event, or they may be part of a larger theoretical system extrinsic to the critical object; at times, the theory will not have been originally created to solve problems in criticism (e.g., Freudian criticism). A model may consist of a single theoretical framework (e.g., Burke's dramatistic theory), or a synthesis of more than one perspective (e.g., Jung's psychology and Eliade's perspective on ritual, as in this project).

As a model unfolds, it typically points to new problems in the work at the same time it aids the critic in answering the initial questions.

These new questions necessitate modification and extension of the model. That is, the model and the critical explanation grow together symbiotically. As Brockriede puts it, the explaining critic "...makes an active use of both partners /data from the experience and the general concept or category system/ and creates an active interaction between them. The explanation is a product of inferences that grow out of that interaction."[10] In turn, the expanded model may illuminate other messages manifesting general issues similar to those of the artifact that originally gave rise to the model, and these new messages will again modify the model. Thus, the model will generalize to, but not beyond, similar critical objects.

Psychological/Ritual Model

The present model has three components. First, it depends on an interpretation of the human psyche. Second, it advances a view of the form and function of initiation rituals. Third, it identifies types and patterns of psychological change that are linked to specific attitudes toward rituals.

The Psyche

Our interpretation of the human psyche is based on the works of Carl Jung, especially that part which concerns the unconscious and dreams.[11] The relevance of this interpretation to "The Deer Hunter" is indicated by a statement made by Cimino in defending the film against those who decried its lack of realism. He said "The Deer Hunter" is "surrealistic, a dreamscape."[12] The psyche, according to Jung, is a self-regulating system which seeks "balance" between its two parts: the conscious and the unconscious.[13] The archetypal part of the self that is observable

to other people is one's persona, a sort of "dressing" for the ego, the conscious, intentional part of the person. The persona is unconsciously formed and appears commonly in dreams. In Jung's view, the persona is, as its name implies, a mask that "feigns individuality, making others and oneself believe that one is individual....it is a compromise between individual and society as to what a man should appear to be."[14] As such, the persona presents the self to society in accordance with socially approved roles.

The reverse of the respectable persona is what Jung calls the archetype of the shadow. The shadow "is the dark, other self which exists in each one of us: it is the dreadful and evil person that we might have been if we had not been so careful to put aside all the tendencies within us of which we do not approve."[15] Paradoxically, the shadow is potentially a source of strength and power.[16] Its power is positive only if the shadow is recognized and accepted by the individual; Jung regards confrontation with one's shadow as the essential prerequisite to self-recognition and change. Such confrontation requires "a considerable expenditure of moral resolution."[17] Typically unconscious to the individual, the shadow appears in waking life as negative projections onto other people.

The fundamental archetype lying at the center of all the others Jung calls "the Self." It is "the archetype of wholeness," because it represents the entire psyche, conscious and unconscious, and Jung says that when active it expresses itself in symbols usually connected with the idea of the diety.[18] When a person deliberately takes on the goal of unifying various parts of the psyche, or searches for the Self, that

person is said to be seeking "individuation," the process of becoming undivided.[19]

Ritual

In large measure, "The Deer Hunter" derives its power from its portrayal of myth and ritual. Their use is fundamental to the psychological development of the film's main characters. Myth and ritual are critical to self and social definition; they permeate all aspects of life, whether in their presence or absence. Myths give archetypal form to widely shared values, providing principles for conduct, while rituals provide expression of the human desire to imitate the gods--or heroes who become what they are by imitation of the gods and represent the hopes and aspirations of their people.[20]

The ritual most germane to "The Deer Hunter," one common to all cultures, is male initiation into adulthood. "Initiation," writes Eliade, "is equivalent to a second birth. It is through the agency of initiation that the adolescent becomes both a socially responsible and culturally awakened being."[21] The ritual takes two forms. Partial rituals concern the conscious self and, if successfully experienced, lead to a strengthened persona. Holistic rituals involve the total person in a radical rebirth. Archaic cultures, for instance, required men to participate in ordeals of torture, suffering, or military combat, risking at least a symbolic death.[22] The purpose of such rituals was to cause the initiate to go back to the origins of earth and life, to confront the Gods and to face his unconscious being.

War belongs to the second type of ritual. In combat, the warrior faces his own shadow figure. The "enemy is a monster; in killing him

one is protecting the only truly valuable order of human life on earth, which is that, of course, of one's own people."[23] Thus, war is more than deer hunting; it is man-hunting. One's own life is at stake. If one approaches this risk as a sacred act, one who survives triumphs, becomes a man and an honored member of society. If one approaches war profanely, as Eliade argues is the case in our time, "the combatants are no longer aware of the deeper significance of their 'ordeals' and hence scarcely benefit by their initiatory meaning."[24] War becomes, then, a senseless act of killing and dying, devoid of mythic import.

The warrior's confrontation with an enemy as intelligent and capable as he forces the surfacing of his own shadow; his persona must contend with its antithesis, both in the enemy and himself, under life and death circumstances. Only the man with a strong persona is likely to survive psychologically a sacred war experience.[25]

Changes in Psyche

Jung maintains that recognition of the "morally inferior" part of oneself creates disequilibrium, demands that the "deficit" be redressed, and requires its assimiliation into consciousness--the result being an altered personality.[26] Four ways are posited by which this process may occur and be revealed in post-war behavior.[27] Three of these paths would most typically be followed by a person with a weak warrior persona. First, the person might credulously accept the unconscious, becoming "an eccentric with a taste for prophecy" or reverting to an infantile attitude, cutting himself off from human society. Second, the warrior might reject the shadow, resorting to "regressive restoration of the persona," eschewing all further risk. The person tries to patch up his

old persona within the boundaries of a much more limited personality, "doing inferior work with the mentality of a scared child." Third, the person may identify totally with his unconscious, becoming overpowered by it. The identification pattern is in a sense an inversion--the shadow becomes the face the person presents to the world, and his previous persona becomes the repressed shadow. Jung also calls this pattern "schizophrenia" and notes that it is generally accompanied by a dramatic sense of "psychic inflation" or powerful "godlikeness," the result of attaining the knowledge of the universal collective psyche, particularly the knowledge of good and evil.

We contend that individuation--the gradual "coming to selfhood" achieved when the person aims at a living cooperation of previously unconscious and conscious factors--would be most probable for the post-war warrior who entered the battle with a strong persona, because his shadow would be less likely to overcome it. The individuated person learns to accept both his uniqueness and his "indissoluble communion with the world at large"--that is, the aspects of himself that he shares with the collective psyche. The individuated person feels power, but of a fundamentally different kind from the person who identifies with his persona. Jung explains the difference:

> It is precisely the strongest and best among men, the heroes, who give way to their regressive longing and purposely expose themselves to the danger of being devoured by the monster of the maternal abyss. But if a man is a hero, he is a hero because, in the final reckoning, he did not let the monster devour him, but subdued it, not once but many times. Victory over the collective psyche alone yields the true value--the capture of the hoard, the invincible weapon, the magic talisman, or whatever it be that the myth deems most desirable. Anyone who identifies with the collective psyche--or, in mythological terms, lets himself be devoured by the monster--and vanishes in it, attains the treasure the dragon guards, but he does so in spite of himself and to his own greatest harm.[28]

In the following analysis of "The Deer Hunter," we shall focus only on three of these patterns--(1) regressive restoration of the persona, (2) identification, and (3) individuation--for these are the three patterns of post-war change exhibited by the three main characters.

The Analysis

We can now examine "The Deer Hunter" in terms of our critical model. We explore first, the psyches of the major characters; second, the initiation rituals in terms of their mythic potential, as well as how the characters experienced them; and third, the changes in the characters' psyches as a result of war.

Psyches of the Characters

The three main characters in "The Deer Hunter" are the good friends, Michael, Nick, and Steven. Michael and Nick share the most intimate relationship. Reflecting to Nick about the others going on the deer hunt, Michael muses, "They're all assholes." The bond between Michael and Nick does not even extend to Steve. In the prison camp in Vietnam, Michael initially tells Nick to forget about Steven--"He won't make it," he warns. Subtle reminders of the intimacy between Michael and Nick occur throughout the film. For example, in the initial bar scene where the two buddies shoot pool, the jukebox croons, "You're just too good to be true, can't take my eyes off of you..." And in a tender moment after Steve's wedding reception, Michael runs drunken and naked through a city street, collapsing under a street light.

Michael: "Hey Nick, think we'll ever come back?"

Nick: "I love this fuckin' place. Don't leave me over there--you gotta promise."

And, of course, Michael does promise.

The ties between Nick and Michael run deeper than friendship. At the outset of the film, they share an interesting complementary relationship: in the terms of our model, Michael's shadow is projected into Nick's persona, while Nick's shadow is projected into Michael's persona. Such an attraction is not unusual. Mahoney explains, "You can fairly surmise which spouses, sweethearts, inseparable friends and intimates are living testaments to the irresistible attraction-of-opposite functions, as though responding to a hidden command to find completion however vicariously through experiencing their opposite, inferior function, expressed in another person."[29] The special closeness of Michael and Nick is expressed symbolically in their mutual (and mutually reciprocal) attraction to Linda.

Michael's persona is characterized by the qualities of self-control or discipline ("You're a control freak," Nick chides him just before the deer hunt), rationality (he stalks the deer strategically), leadership (he attempts--successfully--to control the activities of the Clairton gang), and detachment (he is primarily an onlooker in the raucous wedding festivities). That these persona features are highly valued by the culture is demonstrated by the fact that Michael's leadership of his community is never questioned, though it changes in form. Michael's shadow qualities are spontaneity, empathy, vulnerability, and involvement. Michael remarks to Nick concerning the deer hunt that he "doesn't like surprises." Initially, he is painfully awkward and inept with women and seems disdainful of any form of weakness. In the first part of the film, Michael does resemble the stereotype of the small steel town macho man.

Dominant aspects of Nick's persona are spontaneity ("Wanna get married?" he asks a startled Linda at Steve and Angela's wedding recep-

tion), empathy (he is compassionate when Linda seeks comfort after being beaten by her father), vulnerability (he isn't ashamed to express his fears about going to Vietnam), and involvement (he actively participates in the wedding reception). Nick's qualities are vital to Michael, who is tacitly aware he is unwhole without him. "You're the only one I'll hunt with," Michael professes, although it is obvious to both men that Nick derives little pleasure from the hunt itself. In sum, the predominant features in Nick's persona are the repressed features of Michael's shadow.

Similarly, Nick's unconscious shadow qualities are the elements in Michael's persona. Nick abhors self-discipline, rationality, leadership, and detachment. When Michael angrily refuses to lend Stan his boots for the hunt, scolding him for not being prepared, it is Nick who finally ends the argument by tossing the boots to Stan and asking Michael, "What the fuck's the matter with you?" In his abandoned singing and his relationship with his friends, we see Nick empathic and involved in each experience. He seems uncomfortable with too much reflection.

Although Nick's persona is the opposite of Michael's, it would be a mistake to say that Nick is not masculine. He is a lover <u>par excellence</u>. Not only does he win the group's most attractive woman, but there is the hint that Nick is the father of Steve's bride's baby. The fatal flaw in Nick's character is that, though his persona is probably a more diversified and androgynous one than Michael's, it is not composed of qualities <u>relevant to war</u>. Nick is pacifistic at home; he never fires a shot during the deer hunt, although, being with Michael, he has ample opportunity. Thus, even though he has some qualities that are valued by the culture, his is not a <u>warrior</u> persona.

Steve does not share the interdependence of a complementary relationship with either Michael or Nick. As such, he is less crucial to the film, and his personality is delineated less completely. He is important, however, because he exemplifies the possible fate of someone who is totally unprepared for war. We do get a glimpse of Steve's persona; it is perhaps best described as childlike. The Clairton guys treat "Stevie" like a small mascot they are fond of, and he in turn seems to relate to them as a surrogate family. He drinks beer with the gang, but his mother collars him out of the bar and into his wedding. None of the guys expects him to go on the deer hunt; the only initiation Steve relishes is his wedding, and much of that revolves around women's activities. He probably did not even father his own child, who is blonde like Nick. Michael plays the protective father to Steve, piggybacking him out of the prison camp, and later wheeling him out of the Veterans Hospital. If Steve is consciously childlike, then, his adulthood is buried in his shadow--Steve does not seem to want to grow up, and maybe the group needs a kid, too.

Rituals

"The Deer Hunter" is structured around seven major initiation rituals: a wedding, two deer hunts, a war, and three games of Russian Roulette.

The Wedding. At first glance, it is curious that the first third of the film dwells upon a ritual that is seemingly unrelated to war. The relevancy of the wedding to the film's theme is complex; the wedding itself is a holistic initiation rite different from war. Rather than requiring its actors to experience the depths of the unconscious in order to enter the spirituality of adulthood in the culture, marriage is mythically a restoration of integral wholeness--an imitative celebration

of the union of heaven (the husband) and earth (the wife). Marriage is associated with the fertility of the earth as well as of women, and thus symbolically regenerates the seasonal year and confers fecundity, wealth, and happiness upon the entire community.[30] The animated celebration of the wedding festivities contrasts ironically with the stark lifelessness of war.

The wedding lends more to the film than dramatic irony, however. Although "The Deer Hunter" is above all a man's film, this wedding, typical in modern American culture, is mainly a woman's ritual. Women carry the cake ceremoniously to the church. The camera playfully pauses on the bridesmaids chattering excitedly as they float down a dirty urban street in their pastel organdy gowns, and on the bride as she checks her bulging white profile in the mirror before catching her veil in the screen door. Steven's matriarchal mother oversees the entire ritual.

The significance of the wedding, then, is in the male characters' participation in it. Michael, characteristically, stands back from the festivities, detached. Both Nick and Steve celebrate with gusto. It is the only ritual Steve participates in before the war. His passage to adulthood is not only an initiation rite irrelevant to preparing his persona for battle, but it is mainly a ritual for women in this culture. It is not surprising that Steve is the least able of the trio to cope with the horrors of war.

The Deer Hunt. From the film's title to the anthems accompanying the ritual, it is clear that deer hunting is much more than an annually recurring pastime for the young men of Clairton. What makes deer hunting so special is that to complete the rite successfully by killing a deer demands manly qualities and skills highly valued by the culture. These

qualities include discipline (planning in advance and self-control, as in Michael's "one shot" motto), rationality (strategically stalking the prey), leadership (as shown by Michael's independence from the other guys), and detachment (a singlemindedness of purpose). Deer hunting is a partial initiation into manhood rite that strengthens the personae of those who take it seriously as a sacred activity defining the mythic qualities demanded of the warrior.

The sacredness of this rite is lost on all except Michael. Michael's buddies, except for Nick, get drunk, shoot wildly, and make a lot of noise. Stan symbolizes the unpreparedness of all of them by forgetting his boots. Even Nick experiences the hunt profanely. The crucial distinction between Michael and Nick is captured on the evening of the wedding and the day before the hunt. Michael enters the shack he and Nick share, and after sharply admonishing Nick for not having prepared adequately for the hunt, he reminds Nick of the "one shot" credo. Nick's response is prophetic:

Nick: "I don't think about one shot much anymore."

Michael: "You have to. I try to tell the guys, but they don't listen."

Nick: "I like the way the trees are, y' know?"

Again Michael attempts to make the connection for Nick between deer hunting and the impending war:

Michael: "Y' know--I wouldn't mind gettin' it in the mountains."

Nick: "Why the fuck are we talking about hunting with Steve getting married and us goin' to war?"

The consequences of Michael's and Nick's different attitudes toward deer hunting are profound. Michael approaches the mountaintop as a pinnacle

of spirituality; there he is reenergized for his tasks in the valleys of human existence.[31] His insistence on "one shot" represents the mythic significance of the entire hunt--the optimal way to complete the ritual. Michael fortifies those aspects of his persona needed to successfully complete the deer hunt, and to compete in the war successfully. Campbell puts it well: "By and large, hunting people are warrior people...."[32] For Nick, deer hunting is an aesthetic experience, but one devoid of sacred import. He follows Michael across the mountains preoccupied with their beauty, without ever firing a shot. Campbell pinpoints the problem Nick faces:

> One of the great problems...of our own variously troubled society is just this, that youths brought up to function in the protected fields of peaceful domestic life, when suddenly tapped to play the warrior role, are provided with little or no psychological induction. They are therefore spiritually unprepared to play their required parts in the immemorial game of life and cannot bring their inappropriate moral feelings to support it.[33]

The impending tragedy of Nick is amply foreshadowed in his attitude toward deer hunting.

The War. One of the most recurrent patterns in criticisms of "The Deer Hunter" has been to devalue the film for its historical inaccuracy and political naivete on the Vietnam War.[34] But "The Deer Hunter" is not primarily about the Vietnam War, the Vietnamese people, or even about the Russian subculture in Pennsylvania. The film is about War--especially about the consequences of this ultimate holistic rite of initiation for those differentially prepared to enact it. Experienced sacredly, war is a universal ritual that, through the act of killing a worthy opponent, revitalizes and regenerates the identity and uniqueness of both the warrior and his culture.[35]

Russian Roulette. But war, as "The Deer Hunter" agonizingly demonstrates, is not a sacred ritual for most people in modern times. By far the most mesmerizing and horrifying ritual in the film is Russian Roulette; it is a microcosm of war as a profane ritualistic experience. If war as a sacred rite reaffirms personal uniqueness and cultural identification, then war as a profane game dramatizes with an equal fervor the total dehumanization of the participants and decay of the cultures at battle. The ancient Greek athletic games versus American professional football--recently portrayed in the film "North Dallas Forty"--comes to mind as an analogy. As Kroll puts it, "The VC soldiers are shown as savages, but the image of the Americans holding a gun to their temples is a gut-wrenching symbol of a society committing moral suicide."[36]

Russian Roulette is a game of chance with its own mythic significance. In a life vs. death game of chance, no human qualities or skills can affect the outcome of the game. If men are equally impotent to control it then the players lose all semblance of uniqueness or individuality. It is no accident that those connected with the game were presented in stereotypical sameness. Dehumanized sameness is a consequence of experiencing war profanely--as an exercise in Russian Roulette.

Changes in Characters' Psyches

Given a sense of the characters of Michael, Nick, and Steven--particularly the complementary relationship between Michael and Nick--as well as a conception of the major rituals they experienced, we track the changes in the three men's psyches both as they confront war and afterwards.

Survival--The Prison Hut. P.O.W.'s at the prison camp get their choice: either play Russian Roulette against an equally luckless opponent

to the brutal orders of the Vietcong in a steamy bamboo hut of death or slowly rot in a cage in the filthy rat-infested river below. Along with darkness, the womb, cosmic night, and the belly of a monster, a hut often symbolizes initiatory death, expressing regression to a previous state of being[37] (for example, the witch's, or shadow's, hut in "Hansel and Gretel"). But the game inside could only be found in the profanest of initiations. Kroll captures the scene well: "The suspense and horror are agonizing as the prisoners, quaking with fear, press the pistols to their heads, pulling the trigger to the click of an empty chamber or the roar of an explosion that blasts a fountain of blood from their heads."[38]

Michael, Nick, and Steven do regress to a latent mode of being; from deep within the bowels of this ultimate profanity, the shadows of all three spring forth. All must deal with their darkest personalities immediately, without the comfort and guidance of a therapist, priest, lover, or parent. Michael finds himself almost out of control--both of the ritual and of his emotions. He feels fear, rage, and hatred. His shadow, however, does not totally take over Michael's psyche. His persona has been "prepared" for this task as well as anyone's can be.

In a moment fused with hysterical, but "creative" insight, Michael invents a plan to take control of the ritual--in effect, to change it from a game of chance to a game of skill. He mumbles, as much to himself as to Nick, "Three bullets. We've gotta get them to play with three bullets." This apparently suicidal plan is nothing of the sort. Now cognizant of his unconscious (in the mythic sense, having gained the knowledge of Good and Evil), Michael <u>believes</u> that his will can, in fact, determine where the macabrely-spinning cylinder will stop.[39] The audience can almost see

the inner conflict of personalities as Michael's facial expressions shift from wild hate to calm rationality to fear to self-control. When he takes control of the game, he turns the ritual into a sacred event for himself, and he survives with his persona and shadow intact.

When Michael explains his three-bullet ploy to Nick, Nick shakes his head and replies, "I'm not ready for this." But play he must--ready or not. In the desecrated carnage of the prison hut, Nick's shadow also emerges. As Michael almost coerces him to play the game, Nick's shadow--his discipline, rationality, and cold detachment--takes over, and under Michael's leadership, both survive a ritual that meant almost certain death.

Steve does not fare so well. Totally unprepared for such an ordeal, his shadow (adulthood) tries to emerge, but in battle with his childlike persona, he rejects it and turns into a terrified and whining infant. Even with Michael screaming at him, "Do it, Stevie, do it!" the petrified Steve cannot play the game; at the last instant, he tilts the pistol up and the loaded chamber only grazes him. For his "effort," Steve is relegated to the river coffin. Michael saves the half-dead Steve, but the harrowing escape effort costs Steve his legs, his manhood, and his power.

Post-War Changes. It is one thing to survive physically an ordeal like the prison camp; it is quite another to survive psychologically. We find Nick in a hospital in Vietnam, where his persona fights a gallant but losing battle against his shadow. For Nick's shadow was released upon a weak and ill-defined persona in an holistically profane ritual, and his psyche is "succumbing to the dragon," to borrow Jung's metaphor. He tries to keep in touch with his consciousness--to remain sane--as he keeps

looking at Linda's picture and makes one last abortive attempt to call her in America. But the connection is not made, and he is then swallowed up mystically into the Saigon nightlife as more and more he identifies with his shadow and with the collective unconscious.

Nick searches for Michael, or, just as accurately, for his other half, and for an explanation for his own gradual transformation into Michael's former persona. Nick is drawn to the same ritual that gave him his "godlikeness." With the aid of an opportunistic Frenchman, a Mephistophelean character intent on buying his soul,[40] Nick finds another Russian Roulette game in the Saigon underground, controlled by professionals. The players appear to be destitute young Vietnamese men for whom the monetary rewards outweigh the unspeakable risks.

After watching a player click an empty chamber at himself, Nick stumbles forward, grabs the pistol, clicks a second empty chamber at an astonished Vietnamese player, and then clicks still a third empty chamber at his own temple. Nick seems compelled to test that rush of awesome power he felt when he and Michael took control of the first roulette game. If there was any doubt in his mind over his power to control his own destiny, that doubt vanishes with this scene.

Michael too is at this game--unbeknownst to Nick. But there is a difference. Having prepared himself for war, Michael's persona is strong enough to "subdue the monster" and remain a part of his psyche. Unlike Nick, Michael tests the legitimacy of his control over the first game as a spectator. This is because the compassionate and vulnerable aspects of his emerging shadow allow Michael to keep distance on the deadly rite; he can identify with the players as humans rather than automatons. Ironically, it was Michael-the-player, Nick-the-spectator in

deer hunting. And because of that pattern, it is Nick-the-player, Michael-the-spectator in this second round of Russian Roulette.

The "setting" of the patterns of change in both Michael and Nick is captured symbolically in a poignant scene. After his impromptu act, Nick runs out of the game and is picked up by the Frenchman. Michael fights his way through the excited onlookers and begins chasing Nick through the Saigon streets. After cavalierly throwing his money out of the speeding auto to the street urchins (a sign that he is no longer rooted in material reality), Nick tosses his wallet out as well. Michael tenderly retrieves the last remnant of Nick's former identity. Symbolically, at that moment, Nick's psyche becomes totally dominated by his shadow, while Michael's psyche begins the gradual process of individuation.

After this incident, Michael returns home and finds a paraplegic Steve in the V.A. hospital. Steve apparently prefers the safety of playing Bingo to the uncertainty of facing his catatonic wife at home. Having rejected his shadow, he now has restored his childlike persona in a regressive way; he is more infantile than before, he eschews all risk, and dares nothing. He cries in protest when Michael wheels him home--out of the womb of the hospital.

Meanwhile, Michael begins an awkward courtship with Linda. He seems sensitive that she was Nick's girl, and is empathic over her loss. When she says tearfully, "Did you ever think life would turn out like this?", Michael shows compassion born of experience. The guys are awed at Michael's uniform and at the war stories they sense he could but does not tell. They seem still to accept Michael as their leader, but he does not resume the same disciplined, powerful role. They go on another deer

hunt--this time without Nick. But the Nick in Michael is firmly intact. In a moment of enlightened realization, he chooses not to shoot a stag he has strategically and successfully stalked. He no longer needs to.

Still the haunting reminders of Nick persist--most notably in the money Steve mysteriously receives monthly from Saigon. Michael has made a promise not to leave Nick "over there." He goes back to Saigon to look for Nick and encounters the Frenchman. After bribing the Frenchman to set up a game between Michael and "The American," Michael embarks on a desperate barge trip through the sewers of a burning Saigon.[41]

Finally, the two old friends meet. Nick has completely lost contact with any reality apart from the roulette game.[42] A tragic symbol of mechanical inhumanity, he seems to personify the consequences of profaning our most powerful rituals. He does not recognize Michael and is annoyed at Michael's attempt to "contact" him. Nick seems intent only on playing until his opponent kills himself.

Michael knows that only the roulette game is a wrenching enough ritual to re-kindle Nick's slumbering sanity. But he has forgotten the very lesson he tried to teach Nick before the war; namely, that Nick's unprepared psyche cannot endure the type of change Michael must ask for. Nick's shadow has become the totality of his psyche and its life-preserving feature has given him control over his own mortality--at least within the roulette ritual. To disturb that fragile psyche would be to lose its saving dimension. It is a risk that Michael must take.

As the game begins, the pistol points to Nick. "Don't do it," Michael implores. But Nick does it. Indifferently, he clicks off an empty chamber as his vacant eyes stare at Michael. Michael's turn.

Michael picks up the pistol and looks at Nick. "This what you want?" With that, Michael presses the barrel against his temple, and saying, "I love you Nick," clicks off an empty chamber.

As the two face each other, Michael tries one final time. "We don't have much time, Nick. Come on home. Remember the trees?" A glimmer of recognition crosses Nick's face, the old gentle smile returns for one fleeting instant. "Yeah, one shot." One final time Nick presses the gun to his head. He begins the journey back to consciousness, but the control is gone and the odds have too long been against him.

The Epilogue

The funeral is over. Michael, Steve, Linda, and the remainder of the clan sadly gather in the bar for final good-byes. Hesitantly, first one and then another begin singing "God Bless America." The image is of the warrior returning to his tribe. They are shattered and broken, but it is a far richer and stronger Michael who leads them now than led them at the film's onset. By being psychologically prepared, Michael experienced war sacredly, and in so doing, reaffirmed the mythic qualities in himself and in his community. But re-birth comes slowly and painfully. Only Michael knows the extent to which they all owe their re-birth to Nick. In his final toast, "To Nick," Michael seems to be saying, "To him who gave what he was so that I might become what I am."

Implications

We now consider some implications of our analysis for future studies in criticism.

Rhetoric of War

Of all aspects in "The Deer Hunter," critics are most divided over the film's posture toward the Vietnam War. Some critics are appalled

at the stereotyped Vietnamese characters and the glorification of the American soldier. Others see the film as a brutal denunciation of the horrors of any war. Kroll, for instance, writes that "'The Deer Hunter' is the first film to look at Vietnam not politically, but as the manifestation of an endemic murderousness."[43] Both views have merit. Although we have argued that the film is not about the Vietnam War in particular, certain political implications concerning War in general follow from our model and analysis.

When people experience war as a profane ritual, analogous to a game of Russian roulette, it is hideous. If roulette is taken as the central metaphor, then, the film indeed condemns war as "an endemic murderousness." War as an ultimate profanity does destroy good people like Nick and Steve; it does disrupt and threaten even the most close-knit communities; and war as roulette does force a community to the very edge of despair and disillusionment.

We have argued that a complete understanding of the film demands a model that stresses the aesthetic form of war as a universal initiation rite. To view war aesthetically raises several serious problems. As a sacred ritual, war can perform positive functions: the mythic values of the culture are reaffirmed, societal unity is reinforced, and heroes are provided with a chance to confront their own personal dragons. It does not follow from this, however, that all values reaffirmed through war are good. There is little question that under the tutelage of Adolph Hitler many of the German people experienced World War II as a sacred event brimming with mythic significance.[44] Clearly, however, the values reaffirmed by Hitler are not those most morally responsible persons would endorse. There is also little doubt that Michael, the sole figure in "The Deer Hunter" who experiences the sacred link between deer hunting

and war, fares better than the other characters. The film seems to say: "If you want to survive in war, be like Michael." We might question, however, the emphasis placed on developing a warrior-type persona in young men of our society.

It also does not follow that war is the sole or best ritualistic means for serving these "positive functions." Other rituals, if experienced sacredly by the culture--for example, political elections, national holiday celebrations, etc.--reaffirm values and unite the society in a much less costly, though possibly less profound, manner. Still other rituals, when experienced sacredly by the individual--for example, therapy or religious rites--can effect a rebirth of the total Self without the risk of being killed or the immorality of killing another. The historical truth and rhetorical efficacy of purification and personal rebirth through killing is well-documented, most notably by Kenneth Burke.[45] When the enemy (or shadow) within oneself must be externalized and killed in order for a person to be "born again," rather than confronted within oneself, and particularly when such externalization is sanctioned by a culture in the form of war, we are faced with the ultimate immorality.

In sum, "The Deer Hunter" offers a complex rhetorical stance on war. It is not undeniably clear whether the film is rabidly anti-war, whether it merely portrays what war does to people under both sacred and profane experiences and proclaims nothing, or whether it implicitly advocates personal and societal transcendance through killing. On whatever level one chooses to interpret the film, however, the aestheticizing of war as a universal ritual remains bothersome to us. As Walter Benjamin writes, "The logical result of Fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into

political life."[46] We are not claiming that "The Deer Hunter" is a Fascist film. Ironically, however, in bypassing the politics of Vietnam, the film may have unwittingly allied itself with a heinous political ideology.

Psychological/Ritual Model

In model criticism, the criteria for interpretation arise from the model and not from the intrinsic structure of the critical object.[47] "Our end is accomplished," R. S. Crane notes, with regard to poetry, "when we have established the presence in poems of patterns of action, character, and imagery concerning which we can say that they are patterns originating not in the artistic purposes and inventions of the poets but in antecedent history or prehistory or in human nature itself, our assumption being that the profounder meanings of poems are a function always of the original meanings of the archetypes which they embody."[48] One recurring inference made from this feature of model criticism is that the method inhibits the critic's capacity to evaluate the critical object. If the meaning of a critical object is derived from perspectives outside of the structure of the object, there are no intrinsic grounds for evaluation.

The question is whether critical evaluation is an inherent incapacity of the model methodology. Although we acknowledge that the primary function of the explanatory model is interpretation, evaluation can follow logically from the model perspective, as the foregoing critique demonstrates. If the model required to fully explain a critical object reveals methods in that object that imply a questionable moral posture, then that model itself invites a negative assessment of the object

and its methods. In so far as the model required to explain "The Deer Hunter" uncovers methods which depict war aesthetically as a holistic initiation ritual, the model alerts the critic that some aspects of the film need to be devalued. Thus, our analysis demonstrates one way in which model criticism facilitates evaluation as well as explanation.

The model also implies a heuristically stimulating linkage between film and dreams. Dreams, art, and religion are well-known means of expressing archetypal images and symbols. Film is an art form particularly well-suited to expressing archetypes; it is primarily visual, it is experienced in darkened, dream-like conditions, and, through special techniques, it can simulate the surrealistic plasticity of dreams. As such both film and dreams can deal with what Jung calls the "collective unconscious":

> In addition to our immediate consciousness, which is of a thoroughly personal nature and which we believe to be the only empirical psyche..., there exists a second psychic system of a collective, universal, and impersonal nature which is identical in all individuals. This collective unconscious does not develop individually but is inherited. It consists of pre-existent forms, the archetypes, which can only become conscious secondarily and which give definite form to certain psychic contents.[49]

If dream imagery expresses individual awareness or "personal knowledge" of the collective unconscious, then film imagery expresses one form of public awareness or "social knowledge" of the collective unconscious.[50] The Psychological/Ritual Model implies that an effective social change agent must "see" the relationships between the archetypal images in his/her personal knowledge of the collective unconscious, as expressed in dreams, and the social knowledge, as expressed in rituals. The understanding of these relationships, while not essential to an individual's personal

growth, are important if that person is to function as an instigator of social change.

In fact, the relationship between the personal and social knowledge of the collective unconscious may be more active than we realize. Stanley Kaufmann concludes his remarks on "The Deer Hunter" by lamenting the gap between what the film is as opposed to what it could have been. For us, Kaufmann's stance is far less interesting than the image he chose to express his concern. Paraphrasing T. S. Eliot, Kaufmann concludes, "between the idea and the reality fell the shadow."[51]

References

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[1]Silvia Feldman, "Eloquent Visions of War," Human Behavior, 8 (February, 1979), 77; and David Denby, New York, cited in Tom Buckley, "Hollywood's War," Harpers, April, 1979, 85.

[2]Denby, 85.

[3]Jack Kroll, "Life-or-Death Gambles," Newsweek, December 11, 1978, 113.

[4]Kroll, 115

[5]Marsha McCreadie, "The Deer Hunter," Films in Review, April, 1979, 242.

[6]Pauline Kael, "The God-Bless-America Symphony," The New Yorker, December 18, 1978, 66.

[7]Buckley, 88.

[8]Studs Terkel, "On Seeing 'The Deer Hunter'," Chicago, May, 1979, 210.

[9]Wayne Brockriede, "Rhetorical Criticism as Argument," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 60 (April, 1974), 170-71.

[10]Brockriede, 171.

[11]We wish to make it clear at the outset that we are not attempting a complete Jungian analysis of the characters; we do, however, believe

that the film presents enough evidence to cast the characters as broad types. Thus, we use only that part of the vastly complex Jungian system that facilitates our critical analysis. Our principal sources on Jung are: David Cox, Modern Psychology: The Teachings of Carl Gustav Jung (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1968); C. G. Jung, Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self. Collected Works, Vol. 9. ii (Zurich: Rascher Verlag, 1951); C. G. Jung, Memories, Dreams, and Reflections, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Random House, 1965); C. G. Jung The Undiscovered Self, trans. R. F. C. Hull (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1958); C. G. Jung, Two Essays on Analytical Psychology, Collected Works, Vol. 7, 2nd ed. (Zurich: Rascher Verlag, 1928); Maria F. Mahoney, The Meaning in Dreams and Dreaming (Secaucus, New Jersey: The Citadel Press, 1976); and The Portable Jung, ed. Joseph Campbell, trans. R. F. C. Hull (New York: The Viking Press, 1971).

[12]Buckley, 85.

[13]Mahoney, p. 36.

[14]Jung, Two Essays on Analytical Psychology, cited in The Portable Jung, pp. 105-106.

[15]Cox, p. 142.

[16]Mahoney, p. 110.

[17]C. G. Jung, Shadow, Animus and Anima, cited in Mahoney, p. 108.

[18]Cox, pp. 153-54.

[19]C. G. Jung, The Interpretation of the Personality (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1939), p. 105. In the more complete model, Jung identifies two levels of the unconscious: the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious. The shadow, anima, animus and persona are

archetypes that have both personal and collective manifestations. Furthermore, the persona is dominated by one of the four functions (Thinking, Feeling, Intuition, or Sensation), whereas the shadow is dominated by the antithesis of the persona function. Thinking and Feeling are opposites, as are Intuition and Sensation.

[20]Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and The Profane (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1959), p. 102. Eliade explains that his usage of the term "archetype" differs from Jung's. Whereas Jung uses archetypes as the universal symbols of the collective unconscious, Eliade's archetypes refer to "exemplary models" or "paradigms." See The Myth of the Eternal Return (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1954), pp. xiv-xv.

[21]Mircea Eliade, Myths, Rites, and Symbols, Vol. 1, eds. Wendell C. Beane and William G. Doty (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), p. 174; Mircea Eliade, Rites and Symbols of Initiation: The Mysteries of Birth and Rebirth, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), pp. 1-4; C. G. Jung, Four Archetypes, trans. R. F. C. Hull (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973), especially pp. 45-83.

[22]Eliade, Rites and Symbols of Initiation.

[23]Joseph Campbell, Myths to Live By (New York: Bantam Books, 1972), p. 177.

[24]Eliade, The Sacred and The Profane, pp. 207-208.

[25]By contrast, in the protracted ritual of psychotherapy, C. A. Meier claims, "The stronger the Persona is, the more rigid it becomes and the more the bearer is jeopardized from influences within." See "The Cutter Lectures," Andover Newton Theological School, Newton Center, Massachusetts, cited in Mahoney, p. 106.

[26]Jung, Two Essays on Analytical Psychology, in The Portable Jung, p. 116.

[27]All four of these patterns are discussed in Jung, Two Essays in Analytical Psychology and are reprinted in The Portable Jung, pp. 83-138.

[28]Two Essays in Analytical Psychology, in The Portable Jung, p. 119.

[29]Mahoney, p. 95. It is also common for a person to hate, rather than be attracted to, another onto whom one has projected one's shadow.

[30]Eliade, The Myth of the Eternal Return, pp. 23-27.

[31]The association of the mountaintop motif with spiritual heights is common in mythology, literature, and rhetoric; e.g., the gods of Mount Olympus, Moses receiving the Ten Commandments from Mount Sinai, Martin Luther King, Jr's. "I Have Been to the Mountaintop" speech of April 3, 1968, etc. For a discussion of this motif, see Maud Bodkin, Archetypal Patterns in Poetry: Psychological Studies of Imagination (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), pp. 99-104.

[32]Campbell, p. 176.

[33]Campbell, p. 177.

[34]For example, see Peter Arnett, "'Deer Hunter' is Good Drama, but Bad History," Chicago Sun-Times, April 29, 1979, 7; Studs Terkel is the most graphic: "In fact, the movie may actually justify to some audiences, especially the young, our adventure in Indochina. They may wonder, If these gooks and slopes are such bastards why didn't we bomb the bastards back to the Stone Age? Was Curtis Le May a consultant on this film?", 210.

[35]Eliade, Rites and Symbols of Initiation, p. 4.

[36]Kroll, 113.

[37]Eliade, Rites and Symbols of Initiation, pp. xii-xv.

[38]Kroll, 113.

[39]The belief that one has mystical control over chance events is not unusual. Jung cites numerous examples of "ego-inflated" persons who believed they possessed unusual powers in the initial phases of coming to grips with their shadows. See Two Essays in Analytical Psychology, in The Portable Jung, pp. 83-103.

[40]Jung calls the confrontation of the conscious with the unconscious the "Faustian Problem"; see Two Essays on Analytical Psychology, in The Portable Jung, p. 117. "Mephistopheles is the diabolical aspect of every psychic function that has broken loose from the hierarchy of the total psyche and now enjoys independence and absolute power," he writes in "Individual Dream Symbolism in Relation to Alchemy," Collected Works, Vol. 12, reprinted in The Portable Jung, p. 343.

[41]The "night sea journey" is a very common motif in fairy tales and literature, usually symbolizing a trip toward unity--e.g., the hero journeys to meet his bride (anima). It is prophetic, of course, that this night sea journey is polluted.

[42]In giving us a glimpse of Nick's needle-tracked arm, we believe writer/director Cimino committed one of the few serious artistic errors in the film. If Nick's ultimate de-humanization is due to drugs, then neither Nick nor we can be held responsible for his acts.

[43]Kroll, 113.

[44]The classic rhetorical example of the sacredness of the war is Leni Riefenstahl's "Triumph of the Will." Of that film, Marsha Kinder and Beverle Houston comment, "The final night rally takes on the appearance of a religious ceremony as the hall, darkened by shadows, becomes like a cathedral and the camera cuts to the twisted cross of the swastika as

Hitler says of the party, 'Its total image will be like a holy order.'" Close-up: A Critical Perspective on Film (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1972), p. 118.

[45]Kenneth Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives; The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970).

[46]Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in Illuminations (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 241.

[47]For some consequences of this perspective for literary criticism, see R. S. Crane, The Language of Criticism and the Structure of Poetry (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1953), especially pp. 120-139.

[48]Crane, p. 135.

[49]The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious, in The Portable Jung, p. 60.

[50]Thomas B. Farrell, "Knowledge, Consensus, and Rhetorical Theory," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 62 (February 1976), 1-14.

[51]Stanley Kauffman, "Stanley Kauffman on Films," The New Republic, December 23, 1978, 22.